

A Christian Lawyer Looks at the Judgment

**Kenneth
H. Hopp**



Seventh-day Adventists are familiar with the theme of divine judgment, if for no other reason because they profess to be proclaimers of the judgment-hour message of Revelation 14. Seldom, however, do they consider the judgment from an attorney's point of view. This book brings out many comparisons and contrasts between the legal processes of earthly courts and the heavenly legal process by which God brings sin to an end.



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Introduction

The training one brings to the study of the Bible enables him to perceive truths that someone else might overlook. For instance, an article I once read on Christ, written by a physician, helped me better to appreciate the Great Physician. A shepherd writing on the twenty-third Psalm can help me better to understand the Good Shepherd. By the same token, a lawyer writing about Heaven's laws may be able to bring out spiritual truths others might never consider.

As a practicing attorney I believe I can see some things in the biblical teaching of judgment that a layman might miss. I deal with judgments. I argue before judges and try to persuade them to decide my way. I prepare written judgments. I act on judgments. I also see some things in Christ our Advocate (1 John 2:1) that those not trained in the legal profession may never have thought about.

A lawyer also holds an advantage in discussing certain terms that are common to both the legal profession and theology. Take the word *covenant*. On occasion I may have to deal with a covenant of a deed. Or take the term *justify*. I frequently have to consider whether or not certain acts are justified. Or *redeem*. Property sold to satisfy a debt may be redeemed.

There is a good reason why theological terms have been carried over into legal practice, or perhaps, why legal terms have carried over into theology. In the Middle Ages judges were also priests. But there is more to the story. I once took a course on the philosophy of law from a professor who had some knowledge of theology. He remarked that law and theology were working the opposite sides of the same street. I have to agree.

Law and theology both use the word *judgment* because the word represents a concept with which both professions must deal. This is not to say that they deal with it in exactly the same way, but there are striking similarities, and I believe that experiences I have had with earthly judgments can bring out meanings relative to God's judgment that are sometimes overlooked.

The idea of the judgment is part of the faith once delivered to the saints. The Lord frequently spoke of judgment. In His last discourse before His crucifixion, Jesus spoke the parable of the ten virgins, five of whom were wise and five foolish. All of them were waiting for the bridegroom to arrive for the wedding reception, but only the wise ones were admitted. The reason for this exclusion is that there was a judgment. This is equally true in the case of the parable of the sheep and the goats. Elsewhere Jesus spoke of wise and foolish servants and of how they were each rewarded according to their works. All of these parables bring out the idea of judgment. The concept of judgment is essential to theology. In fact, if God were to *fail* to judge sinners, He would be inconsistent.

This book aims at discovering what is involved in God's judgment. But before beginning our discussion we need to define our terms. God's judgment is the legal process by which He brings the sin problem to an end in a manner that is both just and merciful.

I do not claim that because I am a lawyer I know all there is to know about God's judgment. But then, I don't *have* to know everything there is to know about it in order to discuss it. God has given us all the information we need to make intelligent decisions respecting His laws. This is like a surgeon explaining to his patient why he needs an operation and what he expects it to accomplish. It does not mean that the surgeon has to explain every detail of the operation before the patient consents to submit to it. Similarly, it would be foolish to demand that God explain everything regarding the judgment before we accept His solution to the sin problem.

If this book helps you to understand God better, it will have accomplished its purpose. And yet, in working toward this objective, it is well to remember that the wisest of men will fall short of fully understanding all that has been revealed concerning what God is doing in His judgment process.

Basic Assumptions

We have all heard arguments that led nowhere. The reason for this is that the arguers held different basic assumptions, and they never defined their terms.

When I was in law school I witnessed several heated debates concerning whether or not some proposal was democratic. Eventually I discovered that the arguers had radically different ideas about the meaning of democracy. Some felt that it meant rule *by* the people; others felt it meant rule *in favor of the people*, whether the people had anything to say about it or not. In retrospect it seems obvious that any given proposal could be “democratic” depending on how the debater defined the term, and antidemocratic in terms of another debater’s definition. This points up the need for defining our terms right to begin with.

Discussions concerning religion can also lead to useless arguing, when terms are not defined or explained. For example, someone who reads the statement in John 21:18, 19 that Peter would have his hands stretched forth when he died might well reason that this statement shows that the book must have been written after Peter’s death by crucifixion. The unspoken assumption made by such a person is that it is impossible to predict the future. However, someone else who believes that God knows the future will use the same passage to prove it.

Rather than have arguments that lead nowhere, we should seek to define our terms so that our discussions lead to a better understanding of the topic. To do so also requires that we clarify what we take as our basic assumptions.

I make two assumptions as I begin the discussion that is the subject of this book:

1. God reveals Himself to mankind in the Bible.
2. Human reason can understand this revelation.

You have doubtless heard that there is a conflict between reason and revelation. However, when we analyze the problem, we find that there is really no conflict. Where there appears to be conflict, we usually find on closer observation a misunderstanding relative to some basic assumptions.

Revelation supplies facts; reason processes those facts just as it processes facts supplied by the senses. Reason alone, without facts, can no more supply you with the right conclusions than the ability to do arithmetic can put money in your bank account. On the other hand, a knowledge of arithmetic can be useful in banking.

Once you have the money in your account, the ability to do arithmetic can help you to keep track of it. The same is true with respect to reason after you clearly grasp the biblical facts.

Our senses supply us with facts. They do so directly through our eyes and ears, etc.; they do so indirectly by what we learn from what others have seen and heard. These "others" can include God. What He reveals to us in the Bible are also facts. Once we have these facts, reason can go to work.

Reason and revelation do not conflict; they complement each other. God can reveal much more to someone who is able to reason than He can to someone who is unable to reason. Our inability to reason is not the only limitation on God's ability to reveal Himself to us. He can reveal Himself to a parent who has had the joys and heartaches of raising children in a way that He cannot to a person who lacks that experience. He can reveal Himself to someone who has just had a disastrous setback in his life in a way that He cannot to someone who has known only prosperity. He can reveal Himself to someone who has been through a serious illness in a way that He cannot to someone who has enjoyed only good health. God can reveal Himself to someone who has committed a gross sin in a way that He cannot to someone whose life has been one of unwavering compliance with God's commandments. It goes without saying, of course, that just because God

can turn a curse into a blessing should in no way encourage us to invite the curse. But the fact remains that He can use bad situations to reveal Himself.

Because of our limitations, God's revelation is necessarily inexact and partial. At times it may even appear contradictory. For example, we read in Proverbs 9:10 that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Then we read in 1 John 4:18 that perfect love casts out fear. Can we reconcile these two statements?

An experienced Christian has no trouble reconciling the two statements, whereas someone who is not a Christian may see in them proof of the inconsistency of Scripture.

I believe that God has revealed Himself in the Bible. I don't deny that He reveals Himself in other ways, in nature, for example. But the revelation of God in the Bible is fuller and clearer.

This does not mean, however, that the Bible is a science textbook, and yet I believe that the scientific facts it expresses are accurate. I don't regard it as a history book, but I regard the history that it contains as reliable.

Some have claimed that the Bible contains many historical discrepancies. In matters not essential to salvation this may be true in a limited sense. But these few, minor inaccuracies in no way affect the great facts pertaining to salvation.

In regard to history, some charge that biblical history is biased and incomplete. But a careful analysis of any history book shows that it too is biased and incomplete. The reason for this is simple. A historian must be selective. He cannot include everything, and in being selective his history is both incomplete and biased. It reflects his particular point of view.

On the other hand, it is not unheard of for critics to pronounce as inaccurate something that the Bible states as fact, only to discover later that the Bible was right and they were wrong. There was a time when scholars thought that Belshazzar was a mythical character. But later excavations in the ruins of Babylon revealed that there was a Belshazzar who was king of Babylon and that he was the son of Nabonidus and coregent with his father.

As we continue this study I shall refer to various Bible statements. I shall do so because I believe that they are true and hence constitute a solid basis to reason from. I shall use the Revised

Standard Version of the Bible (RSV) in my quotations, because scholars generally agree that it is a reasonably accurate translation. It also happens to have been the one I was reading when I became a Christian. At the time I happened to be stationed in Tokyo as a legal officer in the air force. I was an agnostic, but I liked to read. I prided myself on the extent of my learning. God used this weakness to reach me. He asked me if I could really call myself educated if I had not read the Book that, even as an agnostic, I knew had shaped Western civilization more than any other. When I heard that this version was available in the main post exchange in Tokyo I bought it and read it through.

Reading the Bible had some effects on my life that I had not planned on. Later I visited some Christian relatives, where my knowledge of the Bible enabled me to take part in some discussions. I began to examine my reasons for being an agnostic. One thing led to another, and I found myself becoming a Christian.

I found that, if one accepts certain basic assumptions, it makes good sense to accept the religion of the Bible. This religion teaches that there is a coming judgment.

Rebellion in Heaven

In Revelation 12 we read of a war in heaven, a war in which Satan opposed God. Satan lost and was cast out from heaven to earth.

What started this war? Isaiah tells us. We read, “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.’ ” Isaiah 14:12-14. Another way to translate “Day Star” is “Lucifer,” another name for Satan.

Lucifer decided to establish his throne above the throne of God. He would make himself like the Most High. Who could possibly be so foolhardy as to imagine he could do such a thing? Yet this is exactly what Lucifer aspired to do. Revelation 12 indicates that he had plenty of angels—angels who must have been persuaded that Lucifer’s ambitious plan was credible.

The popular imagination pictures Satan as a being clad in red underwear, with horns, hooves, and a tail, and carrying a pitchfork. Wherever this concept came from, it did not come from the Bible. The Bible pictures Lucifer’s original appearance as beautiful, so beautiful, in fact, that he became narcissistic—he fell in love with himself. He became proud. Compare Ezekiel 28:11-17 with Isaiah 14:12-14.

Only the broad outlines of the issue involved are set forth in the Bible, but it seems evident that Lucifer’s self-worship led him to

criticize the way God was running the universe. After he was cast out of heaven, he continued his criticism and talked Eve into disobeying God. He did so by assuring her that God was withholding something good from her when He forbade her to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Lucifer must have used similarly persuasive arguments on the angels. Why should *God* have all the glory? After all, this was rather egotistical, wasn't it? He ought to share His glory. Angels were grown up enough to know what to do, without having to submit to a bunch of rules. Such regulations abridged their freedom. Lucifer declared that, given half a chance, he could do a better job of running the universe than God could.

God gave Lucifer a chance to demonstrate what would happen if he were in control. This world is where this experiment is taking place. The experiment has been in progress for the past several thousand years. Someday soon God will bring it to an end.

Why did God give Satan a chance to show what he could do? Surely God in His infinite wisdom must have known of the misery that would result from allowing this experiment to take place. Why? The answer is that it was worth it—not in the short run, to be sure, but in the long run. When it is over, it will be seen that it was worth all the suffering humanity has gone through.

Revelation 12 also tells us that many angels remained loyal to God. They, too, heard Satan's accusations against God. They heard him claim that Adam and Eve could no more live in obedience to God's laws than he could. And when Adam and Eve fell Satan exulted, "There's the proof! I'm right and God is wrong. Man as God created him was as unable to keep God's laws as I was. God, not I, is at fault for the existence of sin."

What was the effect of these accusations on the good angels? These were tough arguments to answer. Perhaps some of the angels even wondered whether just possibly Satan might not be right after all. God had to deal with those questions. There were no easy answers. The angels that remained loyal to God had to trust Him as He worked out the answer to the sin problem. His answer was to allow Satan to demonstrate the results of implementing the principles he was advocating and permitting His rational creatures to choose between Satan's way and His way.

This demonstration which unmask's Satan's deceptions and exposes his lies also reveals God's wisdom and His love for His creatures. When the sin experiment is over, we shall have proof that He is Someone who can fully be trusted.

One of the great problems that perplexes us is the problem of why are people allowed to suffer—frequently through no fault of their own. Suffering results from the violation of law. But such suffering may not always be the result of personal violation of law. Frequently it is caused by the violation of law by someone else. For instance, one may suffer for the rest of his life because someone carelessly ran a red light. But the wonderful thing is that God understands what we have to go through and supplies grace that enables us to endure. Christ came to this earth to *share* our suffering. He suffered through no fault of His own. His sufferings show that God is doing more than merely setting up a demonstration to prove His wisdom and His power. By suffering with us, God is able to understand what we have to go through in this life, and this affords Him an opportunity to demonstrate His great love for us. This is the message of the cross. This is the message of Christ's life on earth.

Someday the sad demonstration will end, and when it does, there will be an era of peace such as the universe has not known since the inception of sin. But before this happens there must be a judgment to bring out the results of the demonstration, and this judgment is based on law, God's law.

Law in the Bible

The Bible has much to say about law. It is true that the law the Bible talks about is different from the kind of law which has been the subject of my practice. But there are parallels, and these parallels are enlightening.

The law I deal with in my practice has at least three purposes:

1. To guide the way people live.
2. To settle disputes.
3. To express policies governments wish to follow.

The first purpose is obvious. People want to know how to order their lives in a safe and reasonable way. They want to know where their rights end and those of their neighbors begin. They want to know what is the fair thing to do. In my practice I have had people ask me for advice on all of these points. There are some things people have *not* asked for advice about. For example, I have never had anyone ask me whether it was right to steal. Both honest and dishonest people know that it is not right. But they may ask about some contract they are considering signing. What does it mean? If they have already signed it, what are their rights and duties? There are similarities here between human laws and God's law.

The second purpose will someday not be a purpose of God's law, for where people live in perfect harmony there are no disputes to be settled. Someday we will reach that state. But we are still short of that state, and law, including God's law, must deal with such disputes.

The third purpose of law—expressing the policy of the govern-

ment—is also present in God's law. While the term *law* in the Bible is by no means limited to the Ten Commandments, these commandments are a good summation of the principles expressing God's policy with respect to His creatures.

It is hard to imagine that someone has to be told that he ought not to steal, but there are such people. So, there is a commandment that forbids it. It is easier to see why someone might be unable to see anything wrong with worshiping idols. A commandment that forbids it makes our duty clearer. It is still easier to see why a commandment against coveting is needed.

So far as society is concerned, *obedience* to the law is much better for everyone than having to deal with *disobedience* to it. The best murder case is one that never happened. The same is true of divorce. The best accident case is one that never occurs. All of this may be hard on my practice, but it is good for society.

The same is true of God's law. The Ten Commandments are not arbitrary rules, rules that could just as easily have been different as being the way they are. Can you imagine a healthy and prosperous society where murder, theft, and slander were acceptable behavior?

You may say that all this is easy to see with respect to murder and stealing. They are obviously out of harmony with a prosperous society. But what about the commandments that have to do with our relationship with God? Why is it wrong to worship other gods, as forbidden by the first commandment? Why is it wrong to make images even of the true God, as forbidden by the second? Why is it important that we not take the Lord's name lightly? What is so important about keeping the Sabbath?

Obedience is much easier if those who are subject to a law have confidence in the wisdom and character of those who frame and those who administer it. God combines the offices of administrator, lawgiver and judge. (See Isaiah 33:22.) Obedience to His law will be easier if we know that He has our best interests at heart. The demonstration of the outworking of sin is designed in part to build up confidence in God's character.

The following hypothetical situation illustrates this point. Suppose a couple has two children. The parents warn them not to eat the green apples growing on a nearby tree. If they eat those ap-

ples, they will become sick. Both children wonder if this will actually happen. Now let us suppose that one of the children expresses his doubts by eating some green apples. The other child doesn't eat the apples, but he still questions his parents' wisdom. Sure enough, the disobedient child who ate the apples becomes sick. The other sees the result of his disobedience. Both have learned something about eating green apples, but in different ways. More important, they have also learned something about their parents, their wisdom, and their concern for them. Next time they warn the children about some danger, they are much more likely to obey.

But such an experience is no guarantee that they will obey next time. Some children refuse to learn, no matter how clear the lesson and no matter how often it is repeated. Some children may even blame their parents as the cause of their stomachache rather than the green apples.

In a way God faces a similar problem. Some refuse to learn from the sin demonstration. Others even blame God for their misfortunes.

If we trust God, believing Him to be a Being both wise and caring, we will be more likely to accept all His laws as expressions of His wisdom and love. We will be more prone to accept His law as being designed for our good and will want to obey that law, not simply because He has commanded us to, but because we have learned to love and trust Him.

If we do *not* learn to love and trust God, we will probably have a different response. We may obey Him, not because we love Him, but because we fear Him. We may offer sacrifices to Him, not because we love Him, but only to placate His anger. We may sing His praises, not because we love Him, but because we hope to escape the judgment to come. All such responses fail to appreciate what God's law is all about.

What Is Man Like?

Any understanding of judgment has to take into account the character of the one judged. For example, we may favor a plan of rehabilitation for someone convicted of a crime. But this assumes that the convict is corrigible. Unless he desires to change and puts forth efforts to this end, his case is hopeless.

Many *assume* incorrectly that all people are reformable. But this is not true. What should be done with those who have no desire to change for the better?—put them through a course of rehabilitation, pronounce them cured, and turn them loose—to commit other crimes?

But then there are those who are convinced of this saying: “Once a criminal, always a criminal.” For such people, trying to reform a criminal is seen as an exercise in futility. Neither of the foregoing extremes is true. Some criminals are incorrigible, others are not. The truth lies somewhere in between these two philosophies.

There are those who believe that human beings are wholly the product of their environment—the influences of childhood, the upbringing, the school system, the neighborhood. According to them, these are the things that make people what they are. The opposite extreme is the belief that our genes predetermine our character.

Either of these extremes is fallacious. But again, the truth lies somewhere in between.

Many think that through willpower alone a person can reform himself, and there is no denying the fact that much can be accom-

plished through the exercise of sheer willpower. But such reformations are not productive of the most wholesome results. Very often, if not invariably, they lead to pride and to contempt and intolerance of others.

If human behavior were entirely the product of childhood environment and genetic inheritance, human beings could plead that, because they were born of sinful parents in a sinful world, they are not accountable for their misdeeds. But such reasoning ignores an important factor—divine power that God offers to change behavior. God does not condemn human beings because they were born sinners in a sinful world. That they could not help. He does condemn them, and justly so, if they neglect or reject the means He offers for reformation and salvation.

Since we are neither completely the product of outside influences nor of our own efforts, God's judgment will be both a moral judgment, because we do have some power of choice, and a fitness judgment, because, in the final analysis, He is also concerned with what kind of people we are.

In this chapter we are dealing with the concept of divine judgment from the standpoint of morality. By morality I mean an individual's accountability for the choices he makes with respect to God's law. This involves human behavior, and human behavior stems from the power of choice.

The power or ability to choose is not something static. It varies even within an individual. This variability is not a matter of chance. Let me illustrate. Let us suppose that a person decides to drink a shot of whiskey for the first time. No one forces him to do so. He takes the drink because he deliberately chooses to. But with continued drinking he becomes an alcoholic and his power to choose diminishes.

If we simply look at the alcoholic without considering his first drink, we could conclude that he is not responsible for an accident in which he killed three people, because, as some claim, alcoholism is a genetic weakness. After all, we don't hold a person responsible for a crime he commits, if he was born insane.

But then, when we see that the alcoholic originally *had* the power to choose, that he deliberately chose to drink, and that his drinking led to alcoholism, we see that a moral issue *is* involved.

The alcoholic does have a responsibility for the loss of three lives.

Even if alcoholism is a genetic weakness, a person will not become an alcoholic unless he drinks. But my main point is this: The exercise of our power of choice can actually weaken our willpower. This is what happens in alcoholism and drug abuse. But, by the same token, the right exercise of the power of choice can strengthen a person's willpower.

Our power of choice is not something abstract. We do not choose good or evil in the abstract. Rather, we choose *this* good or *that* evil. To put it another way, we choose between available alternatives. The alternatives available to some people may not be those that are available to others. Furthermore, particular choices available may be morally unimportant or highly significant. For example, there are a lot of books in the world. My decision to choose between a book that will strengthen my character does have moral overtones. What we read will, sooner or later, have a bearing on our conduct. The choices I make reveal two things: (1) They reveal the kind of person I am, (2) and they reveal the kind of person I will be, if I continue to make the same choice.

Character is the result of a lifetime of choices, and character is what fits us or unfits us for heaven.

Unless one is Robinson Crusoe, no one lives entirely independent of other people. The saying, No man is an island, is true. The choices we make do affect other people, sometimes in ways we do not anticipate. Let me illustrate. Some married people seem to think that they can be promiscuous without producing consequences, and they may seem to get away with it for a while. But too many broken marriages testify to the speciousness of such reasoning. Not only does such behavior result in evil consequences for the adulterer, but very often it brings mental and physical suffering to innocent victims. Whether they acknowledge it or not, those who indulge in such behavior are morally accountable for their actions.

God Wants Willing Obedience

The fact that human beings are free to make moral choices says something about God's concern for the best good of His earthly children. For one thing, it says that He wants willing and intelligent obedience. Some seem to think that mechanical and unthinking obedience would have been best, but obviously God disagrees. There is a reason why He wants willing, intelligent obedience. This reason has to do with the sort of universe He wishes to preside over. He could have created us robots, but He chose to create a universe with free moral agents fully capable of choosing good because they appreciate His love and because obedience makes good sense.

God could have created a universe in which misconduct was impossible. To do this all He would have had to do would be to have deprived us of our free wills, or, to be more precise, He could have seen to it that we could choose only good. To use a modern expression, He could have "programmed" us. But He did not.

Some may feel that God was unwise to create intelligent beings with the power of choice. But those who feel this way seem to forget that it is this very power that gives love its value. The words, "I love you," expressed with a hug and a kiss by a robot are worthless. But these same words spoken by a little child are priceless. Why? Because that child could have chosen to say, "I hate you"; instead it chose to say, "I love you." A robot could never do this. Because God placed great value on love that is freely returned out of appreciation of His character, He reckoned

that the misuse of free will by some of His creatures was a risk worth taking.

We all have heard about children who give their parents a great deal of trouble, trouble which may result in imprisonment for the child. When this happens, the parents may have peace, but they don't normally experience happiness.

Few of us have given much thought to what heaven will be like. I suppose that we reason that it will be nice, and that is enough. But, from what we saw in a former chapter this is not necessarily so. There once was war in heaven; why shouldn't there be war there again?

There are two ways by which God could prevent such wars. He could use naked force. But, if that were the way He wished to prevent rebellion, He would have nipped Lucifer's rebellion in the bud when it started. He had the power to do this. And He demonstrated that He possessed such power when, after bearing long with Lucifer, He cast him and his followers out of heaven. But He only did so after Satan had revealed his true character.

The other way God could prevent a new war in heaven is the costly way He has chosen. He let Satan have a chance to show what sort of a job he could do. The intelligent beings in the universe are looking on. In a sense they are a jury. Soon any lingering doubts which they or anyone else may have about God's character will be dispelled. This will happen when sin has run its course and the final judgment takes place.

We sometimes sing about "a load of sin." But sin is not something that exists apart from individuals. It is a principle existing in free moral agents who have chosen rebellion against God and is therefore inimical to His government and cannot be permitted to exist forever. God is determined to destroy it. If we let Him, He will destroy it outside of us, but, if we are determined to cling to it, He will have to destroy us with it.

By destroying sin God will bring harmony to the universe. After everyone has freely made his choice, and those who have chosen rebellion have been destroyed, God will have a universe of beings who willingly love and obey Him. Such beings will not be programmed to obey Him; they obey Him because they have voluntarily chosen to serve Him.

Judgment—Primitive and Advanced

When I was a young man, long before I became a Christian, I liked to read detective stories. They stimulated my intellect. It was fun to try to discover who was the guilty party before the denouement.

When I look back on those stories from my present perspective I realize I overlooked something. Those stories almost all ended with the guilty party being handcuffed and taken away. But there is much more involved in the punishment of a crime than that.

I remember one writer, Erle Stanley Gardner, whose stories went further than most others. Because He was a lawyer, he usually had something to say about the trial of those who were arrested. His stories brought out the fact that it wasn't enough to discover the guilty party; it also was necessary that he be tried and convicted for his crime. The trial* and conviction involved what I choose to call "primitive judgment."

Mr. Gardner's stories were interesting to me, as a prospective lawyer. But even his stories left out something. I have since learned a lot more about criminal procedure, and part of what I have learned is that, while a verdict of *acquittal* may end my work for a client, a verdict of *guilty* does not. There is a further job to do that most people never think about. The question that faces me in such cases is What do we do with him now?

Before I studied law I assumed that for every crime there was a

*While I refer to a trial, I should point out that most of the time people are found guilty on a plea of guilty. However, this fact does not change the point I am making here.

set punishment. Once a person is found guilty the judge sentences him to that set punishment, and that was an end to the case. But this is not so. Judges usually have wide discretionary powers with respect to the punishment they mete out to a convicted criminal. They can “throw the book at him,” or they can offer him release on probation. The advocates, both for the prosecution and the defense, can give reasons why the judge should decide one way or the other. This decision is much more important and much more demanding, both on the attorneys and on the judge, than is the work that leads up to the court’s decision.

This last aspect of judgment, deciding on the sentence, is the “advanced judgment” mentioned in the title of this chapter. As we shall see, this aspect is much more concerned with what God’s judgment is all about.

If the only issue before the court were whether or not the defendant is guilty, why not decide the sentence on the basis of the police report? Or, if we think that their work requires review, then why not simply try the case before a judge? He could quickly review those where the defendant insists that the police report is inaccurate in some major respect and rule on it. Why must we have the elaborate system of trial by jury?

One reason for the jury system is that it is important that the decision not only be right but that it *seem* to be right. We all agree that a decision should be right and fair. We often overlook the fact that it is also important that the decision *seem* to be right and fair. If people do not believe that our courts’ decisions are indeed right and fair they will be far less willing to obey the law.

If a trial were based simply on the police report, many people would question the fairness of that decision. So, we have an open trial. The defendant can present his side of the case, and a jury of ordinary people decides whom they will believe. Because the public knows that the defendant will have the right to present his side, they have much more confidence in the decision of the court than if the decision were merely based on the judge’s examination of the police record. This is yet another aspect of an advanced judgment.

There is a similar problem when it comes to God’s judgment. If the only issue were simply to decide whether or not we have

sinned, the question would be simple—all of us have sinned. We don't need Romans 3:23 to tell us that. If we examine our hearts we *know* that we have sinned. We also *know* that we deserve punishment.

But this is only the reaction of a person with a conscience. This is the conclusion of a person who will examine his life honestly and admits that at times he has done wrong. Some people, however, refuse to do this. Such people not only refuse to examine their consciences, but they insist they are unjustly accused, when in reality they are guilty.

God must deal with those who are guilty of violating His laws. But it is important that His treatment of the violators of His law be perceived as being treated fairly. Does God, therefore, have something comparable to a public trial before a jury? I believe He does.

In Daniel 7:9, 10 we find a description of a court scene in heaven. This description ends with the statement, "the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened." In Revelation 20 we also read about a judgment. In verses 11 and 12, John the revelator writes, "Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done."

This description may resemble what lawyers call a "court trial," that is, a trial without a jury. But a little investigation reveals that there is something comparable to a jury. In the fourth verse of this chapter is the statement, "Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed." Evidently there are more persons involved in this judgment than God alone. In 1 Corinthians 6:3 Paul asks a rhetorical question that demands a positive answer: "Do you not know that we are to judge angels?" Human beings will share the decision that is made.

Evidently there will be a public judgment. All the intelligent beings in the universe will be satisfied with the rightness of the decision on the basis of the records that are brought forth for examination.

What is God's judgment all about? Some seem to think that in our earthly criminal prosecutions the issue is simply whether the defendant is guilty or innocent. Is this what God's judgment is all about? I have read articles in Christian publications that seem to suggest that it is. I think that those who take this position have overlooked something.

I think we will understand God's judgment better if I point out something many people seem to miss. God is not the only one who judges. Even in our earthly judicial systems, courts are not the only ones that judge.

Whether or not we realize it, we all make judgments. For example, we have a party. We invite some people; we don't invite others whom we know just as well. Why? The reason is that we want people to attend who will fit in with everybody else. When we decided not to invite to our party people whom we knew would not fit in, we made a judgment. We do this all the time.

An admissions committee at a university admits some applicants and excludes others. Why? Obviously the committee members have judged that the applicants they admit will profit by the education offered; others will not.

Please notice that in making such judgments as presented above, we are not as concerned with what these people *have done* as we are with *what they are*. It is true, of course, that what people have done has a bearing on what they are, but at the moment we are looking at the larger picture.

The foregoing examples illustrate God's judgment better than the usual police court scene. God's judgment is not so much a question of justice for what we have done as it is of our fitness for heaven by what we are. In this respect God is like the person giving a party who excludes someone who will not get along there, or an admissions committee at a university who excludes someone who cannot profit from the instruction. But, even if we use a police court illustration, we could say that God excludes from heavenly society those who would not fit in, just as an earthly judge excludes a dangerous convict from earthly society by sending him to prison.

When we realize that God judges us for what we are and not merely for acts committed, we are better able to understand that

God is not arbitrary. By “arbitrary” I mean a choice that God makes without taking others into consideration, and which He makes without good reason. We see that God *does* have a reason, and a good one, for excluding certain people from heaven. He excludes them because they have made themselves unfit for heaven.

The reasonableness of all this is obvious. It assures us that heaven will be a delightful place in which to live. All who are admitted to its joys will have learned while here on earth how to live in harmony with the principles of heaven.

But isn't God arbitrary in excluding those who do not measure up? What about people who are *not* fit for heaven? What about those who were brought up to dominate others, to take advantage of others? Suppose while here on earth that they face up to the fact that they are not fit for the society of heaven? Suppose they want to change? What about them? Are they without hope?

We will take up their problem in a later chapter. When we do, we will see that God has a way of dealing with those who recognize their faults and who by His grace are willing to do something about them.

So He's Guilty— What Now?

In preceding chapters I have said a good deal about what happens when someone is found guilty of a crime. I have pointed out that in human judgments great importance is laid on deciding on an appropriate sentence. The person found guilty may be sentenced to prison for life, or he may be released ahead of time by the parole board and placed on probation. But there is one sentence from which he can never be paroled once it is carried out, and this is the death sentence.

One of the purposes of both punishment and probation is to bring about the reformation of the lawbreaker. We can all agree with this ideal. Obviously, if a person can be made a safe and productive member of society we are all far better off giving him his freedom. By so doing he can make a contribution to society rather than continuing to be a drain upon it.

God's plan also involves reformation. He too believes that it is better for the sinner to become a safe and productive member of the society of heaven than it is for Him to consign him to the divine equivalent of prison.

Experience demonstrates that efforts at trying to reform lawbreakers are not especially fruitful. Don't get me wrong. I believe we should continue efforts to reform criminals. I just don't feel that these efforts are especially effective—*unless the lawbreaker wants to change*. There must first be "a willing mind." 2 Corinthians 8:12, KJV. As we are free to disregard God's wishes in the first place, so we are free to disregard His wishes with regard to our reform. Many convicts resist society's

efforts to reform them. In a similar way we may disregard God's efforts to reform us.

There is one interesting fact that establishes beyond reasonable doubt society's inability to reform those who do not want to reform. Modern prisons, having psychologists, educational facilities, and employment counselors, have been no more successful in reforming inmates than were the old-fashioned prisons whose only purpose was to punish prisoners. Those leaving the modern prisons are just as prone to recidivism as those leaving the old-fashioned jails.

The reason is obvious. Unless an inmate *chooses* to be reformed, society cannot reform him. Parents and teachers have the same problem with a child that chooses not to learn. We can supply convicts with the best and most modern facilities, but we cannot force them to use those facilities for the purpose of reform. What we cannot supply is a willingness to be reformed. The old-fashioned prison was founded on the notion that the only way to induce an inmate to become willing to be reformed was to make his incarceration so unattractive that he would choose reform. But this too was unproductive.

God has a similar problem, because He has voluntarily limited His sovereignty. Having given human beings freedom of choice, God will not compel them to be reformed. He appeals, He holds before us examples, He warns; but we remain free to ignore His efforts. Suffering the consequences of transgression is part of the responsibility involved in our freedom of choice.

Society can supply prisons with every incentive to persuade lawbreakers to reform; but, short of some kinds of brain surgery, they cannot do much more. God could compel human beings to do His will, if He chose, but in giving us freedom, He has voluntarily limited Himself. He has restricted Himself to supplying the divine equivalent of a modern prison's staff. Someone who has been reared in a poor home environment in a wicked society should not conclude that he has no chance. Many born under unfavorable circumstances have achieved high goals. Through His Holy Spirit, God gives everyone a chance for salvation. Along with this God offers every man His enabling grace. As a consequence no one has a legitimate excuse for failure to reform. In the last judg-

ment there will be many of the redeemed who came from very bad backgrounds. They are saved because they accepted God's resources and were healed.

God does not force us to make use of the resources He offers us. They are available to us, but we can refuse to avail ourselves of them. In supplying us with these resources God has eliminated any grounds for anyone saying that His judgment is arbitrary. In an earlier chapter we said that, in part, God's judgment was one of deciding whether or not we are fit for heaven, and not so much whether we have committed certain specific sins. But more than this, those who are excluded from heaven are denied entrance there because they *chose* to remain unfit.

This choice to be unfit for heaven usually is not made consciously. As a rule we make this choice as a result of choosing to follow inclination rather than choosing God's way. But conscious or not, such a choice is against God. We make our choices for or against God in many ways.

Whether we realize it or not, we can even make a choice that will unfit us for heaven by simply *neglecting* to make the right choice. It is possible to drift into hell. However, strange as it may seem, it is not possible to drift into heaven. The reason is that we are born with sinful natures. A convict may see the need of preparing for life on the outside, but if he continues to drift along in his criminal ways, he will not be prepared for a life of freedom. Similarly, we may give mental assent to the fact that we need to prepare for heaven, but unless we "take the cup of salvation" (Psalm 116:13, KJV), we will never get there.

Thinking we can drift into heaven is one of the most serious threats there are to a healthy spiritual life. Now is the time to choose to take advantage of the provisions God has made for our salvation. Now is the time to read good and helpful books and set aside harmful, unprofitable books. We must act *now* to make time for prayer and meditation. We must decide *now* to make use of our time for spiritual growth.

When we have spare time, how do we spend it? If we happen to wake up at night, do we meditate on God's goodness and count our blessings? Or do we toss and turn and fret and fume?

Now is the time to confess our sins and right our wrongs. We

should set aside time to do this, time to review the day's activities and to ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in doing God's will. He may point out that there are some things we need to confess and make right. These may not be anything as dramatic as murder, adultery, or theft. But what about the anger that Jesus condemned (Matthew 5:21, 22) or the lust He described as adultery (Matthew 5:28)? Or what about the thoughtlessness or complaining or criticizing we do? These too should be confessed to God or to our fellowmen, depending on the nature of the sin.

Confession should be made without excuses. If we make excuses when we confess, we are saying that what we did is not really wrong; there was a reason for it. If we do this, there is a probability that we will do it again.

The Unjust Judge

In Luke 18 there is a story known as the parable of the unjust judge. A parable is a story that illustrates a point. My professors in law school used quite a few parables, even though they did not call them that. These parables were useful in bringing out various principles of law which my professors were trying to teach us students.

The parable of the unjust judge concerns a widow who pleaded for a judge to recognize her claim. According to the parable the judge was callous and may have been a well-known figure to those listening to the parable. There are judges like him today. The widow's persistence wore him down, and he finally complied with her request. As an attorney who has often had to wait because of an overcrowded court calendar I can sympathize with her!

Jesus used this parable to bring out a point He wished His hearers to learn. The point was that they should not give up because their prayers were not immediately answered.

When we think of an unjust judge, we are apt to think of someone who is unfair in his decisions, one who bullies witnesses and browbeats the attorneys, one who tries to get innocent men convicted. But this is not what the judge in the parable was noted for. His problem was not that his judgments were unfair. His problem was that he didn't judge at all. He was evidently too lazy to judge. The widow in the parable had to "pester" him to do his work. He was not cruel, only lazy.

Now, we would never accuse God of being like that, would we? Think again. In Revelation 6:9, 10, KJV we read of some martyrs

who were crying out to the Lord: "How long, O Lord, . . . dost thou not judge and avenge our blood?" These are Christian martyrs—people who were put to death for their faith. Surely they are included among the saved. What are they doing? They are represented as crying out. For what? They want to know how long it will be until God judges and avenges their blood!

Don't we hear some echo of this cry in our own hearts? Don't we too wonder how long it will be until the injustice and the suffering that fills the world is ended?

Psalm 96:10-13 states that the Lord will come to judge the world and that this is the reason for rejoicing. Evidently there is reason to think of the judgment as "good news." It was certainly good news for the widow in the parable. It will be good news for the martyrs when God initiates His judgment against their persecutors. The psalmist viewed God's judgment as a cause for rejoicing. Why?

Before I give my answer to this question let me give you some examples from my practice. I hope they will be helpful. Because I have represented both plaintiffs and defendants in civil cases, as well as represented the prosecution and the defendants in criminal cases, I have had an opportunity to observe the various points of view they present.

People who think that they are entirely in the right are usually eager for a chance to prove it. However, they may have deceived themselves in thinking they were so righteous. And yet I have observed that this usually does not alter the fact that they welcome the chance to prove they are right. By contrast, those who are not sure they are in the right look forward to going to court with fear and trepidation.

It is easy to see why someone who knows that he is entirely in the right would look forward to a judgment, for he believes that he will be justified. However, someone who definitely knows he is in the wrong will feel entirely different. He is bound to worry about the outcome. Earthly judgments are supposed to settle cases. Often they don't, but they are supposed to.

God's judgment and earthly judgments have some similarities. God's judgment will end the injustice, the suffering, and the uncertainty that are a part of life in a lawless world. We look forward

to the results of this judgment, and we should. But there is more. The final judgment will include a clear statement as to who is in the right and who is in the wrong. Believing that we will be justified, we look forward to that. Those who have clung to the right have often had their motives, their characters, and often their sanity questioned. These people will be vindicated. God's judgment will put an end to all these questionings. Those who are vindicated will appear to the assembled universe as they truly are—and their detractors will appear as *they* truly are.

But there is more. God will appear to the assembled universe as *He* is. A world that disregards God and despises those who follow Him will no longer be able to do so. Everyone will have to acknowledge His power, His wisdom, and His goodness.

Perhaps this thought has occurred to you: It may be fine for people who have never violated God's law to welcome the judgment. But what about those of us who have less than a perfect record? Does any human being have a perfect record? The Bible declares, "None is righteous, no, not one." Romans 3:10. Even if we never sinned from this day on, our past sins blemish our record. In a sense our condition is worse than that of those who are ignorantly ungodly because we know better. Therefore, how can we look forward to God's judgment with joy?

The only way we can look forward to the judgment with any assurance is to accept divine grace—grace that covers our past sins, grace that enables us to live a new life in Christ. In the great assize we shall be acquitted, not by the good deeds or bad deeds we have done, but because the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed us from all sin. We have developed a living relationship with Christ. If this relationship is one of trust and confidence in the merits and enabling power of the Lord Jesus, we can look forward with assurance to the judgment.

Someday the judgment which the widow demanded and which the martyrs cried out for will take place. When it does take place, we will be asked, "What is your claim to be admitted to heaven?" The only answer that God can accept is, "I am clinging so tightly to Jesus Christ that if you admit Him you will have to admit me."

As we pointed out in chapter one, our claim must be examined, we must be judged. If God were to fail to judge us, He would be

untrue to Himself. Those who are righteous in their own eyes and think they are ready for the judgment should be careful about demanding *justice*. They may get it, but it may not be what they expect. If God judges any human being purely on the basis of his past record, he would have no chance. In view of this what we all need is *mercy*, not justice.

One of the problems with us human beings is that we tend to be either unjustly merciful or unmercifully just. God blends these two contrasting qualities perfectly. His judgment of human beings, whether saints or sinners, is both just and merciful. The same God who assures us that He is merciful in His judgment of us, also assures us that He will delay His judgment of sinners as long as there is anyone who has not made a decision for or against Him. Let us remember that the delay we find so hard to bear is for our benefit as well as for the benefit of those who have not yet made their decisions. God's delay is designed to develop patience in us, while at the same time He gives the undecided additional time to decide.

If we are concerned about the suffering and injustice that is in the world, let us not forget that God is even more concerned. He is not like the unjust judge of the parable, who could sit in his fine house and enjoy life without regard to the just claim of the widow. In the incarnation God became a man and suffered injustice. He knows how it feels to be treated unjustly, and because He knows this by experience, He sympathizes with us when we cry out about injustice and misery.

If the most we can learn from the parable of the unjust judge is that we should continue to pester God with our prayers, well—He has invited us to do just that. The parable of the unjust judge makes this point. It isn't that God needs to be reminded to answer our petitions, but our very persistence in asking can bring us to the point where God can answer our prayers. The delay may seem hard, but the end is worth it.

If we look beyond the delay, which we find so distressing, to Christ, we will discover that the delay is easier to bear. God has given us no promise that today we would have strength for tomorrow, but just knowing that we will have strength as needed will make enduring the delay that much easier.

What Sin Is

When I first became a Christian, someone gave me a definition of sin. It came directly from the King James Version of the Bible: “Sin is the transgression of the law.” 1 John 3:4. I was told that this was *the* biblical definition of sin.

I have difficulty with this assertion. But it is a difficulty that is easily resolved. If the “*the* definition of sin” is changed to “*a* definition of sin,” I can go along with it. “Sin is the transgression of the law”—that is *a* biblical definition of sin, but not the *only* biblical definition of sin.

Since I first heard of this definition, I have discovered no less than three other biblical definitions of sin. There may be more. These definitions are consistent. No reasonable person will be troubled by the fact that there are a number of them.

We shall now analyze and compare these three biblical definitions of sin one by one. But before doing this, let me mention two other definitions of sin, which are not found in the Bible. The first is a popular definition, even though it has little intellectual respectability. Here it is: “Sin is doing something wrong you can’t help doing.”

Let me show you why this definition lacks intellectual respectability. Some years ago, when public debates were popular, two ministers debated the issue of whether or not the Ten Commandments could be kept. The minister who won the debate asked his opponent which of the Ten Commandments he seemed to have trouble keeping. Was it the ninth—the commandment that forbids bearing false witness? Or perchance was it the seventh command-

ment—the one that condemns adultery? (The man was married.)

Can you imagine a man saying to his wife, “Wife, I’ve got to lie to you today; I can’t help it.” I think you can see my point. Yet many people excuse sin on the basis of this definition.

Now let us look at a second definition not mentioned in the Bible: “Sin is whatever will keep us out of heaven.”

I thought of this definition recently when I read about efforts to justify homosexuality among Christians. The humanistic arguments advanced in support of this practice may seem plausible, even persuasive—to some people. But I can’t help but wonder whether they will seem so impressive to someone who is on his deathbed. How can anyone argue that homosexual practices are acceptable to God, when God’s Word so plainly condemns them? See 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 and Romans 1:26-28.

Still more recently I read about the efforts of some to justify sex with children. I’m not speaking of teenagers; I mean practicing sex with *small* children by those who should be their protectors. Those promoting these ideas have the perverted concept that the appropriate “age of consent” to sexual acts should be lowered to four! Well, so far those who hold these opinions have not persuaded many people. But it indicates what kind of a world we are living in.

Now we focus back on the three other biblical definitions. In 1 John 5:17, KJV we read that “all unrighteousness is sin.” While I accept the Ten Commandments as having been written by the hand of God, and while I believe that they describe conduct that is basic to a Christian life, I also believe that the principles they enunciate have a much broader application. Christ brought out some of these amplifications during His Sermon on the Mount. See Matthew 5:21-37.

The next definition of sin I would like to call your attention to is found in James 4:17. “Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” This definition represents a different approach to the subject. Not only does it strengthen what we have said about sin going well beyond what the Ten Commandments require, but it goes on to point out that our duty is affected by our knowledge.

The Ten Commandments are largely negative: You must *not*

commit murder, theft, adultery, etc. You must *not* worship other gods or make an image or take the Lord's name in vain. There are, however, some positive commands, such as honor thy father and mother. And there is, of course, the Sabbath commandment. But even this latter commandment tells us how to keep the Sabbath largely in negative terms. We are not to work or allow anyone within our gates to work. But what we are to do is not stated.

By contrast the definition we have quoted from James brings out some positive duties. It tells us that if we know that something is right to do, failure to do it is sin.

The verse in James also brings out the fact that there is an element of *rebellion* involved in sin. We can illustrate it this way: Here are two teenagers. One of them is reared in a home where smoking is forbidden. The other is reared in a home that sees nothing wrong with smoking. Both boys take up the smoking habit. So far as lung cancer is concerned there is nothing to suggest that one of them is more prone to come down with the disease than the other. But one of the two is being rebellious; the other may not be.

The attitudes of these boys may well be affected by another consideration. Do they know that smoking is harmful? You will recall that in one home smoking was forbidden. But knowing that something is forbidden is not the same thing as knowing that something is harmful. The boy from the strict home may well think that the reason his parents forbid him to smoke is that they don't like the smell. His rebelliousness in this instance is one thing. But if he knows that the parental prohibition is because smoking is harmful to his body, we have another problem. This reason alters the nature of his rebelliousness.

If the boy in the home that permits smoking becomes aware of the harmful effects of tobacco, he may choose to smoke anyway. If he does in the light of this knowledge, an element of rebelliousness enters in, although not the same kind as in the other case. So circumstances alter cases.

Because circumstances alter cases, some use this as an excuse for "situation ethics." Such people insist that there is no such thing as enduring principles. They say that the rightness or wrongness of whatever we do depends on the situation or circum-

stances. There is an element of truth in this. But it is not the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

We now come to the last definition of sin. Romans 14:23: “Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” Evidently sin involves lack of faith, lack of trust in Jesus Christ. Since we need a constant supply of spiritual life from God, failure to believe in God cuts us off from this source of life. Because we are free moral agents, this is our act and, as in the case of cutting off our physical life—suicide—it is sin.

Sin is the transgression of God’s law. But it is more than this. It involves a failure to do that which we know is right. It involves a failure to trust God to give us the power to fulfill His will.

Some Other Problems

We have considered the judgment in terms of the demonstration of God's righteousness and in the light of the accusations made by Satan against Him. We have considered the judgment in the light of the effort God has made to save us while leaving us free to reject Him if we see fit. We must now consider the judgment in the light of two further problems.

Suppose someone moves in next door to you. Soon after, you discover that your new neighbor has just been released from prison. You examine the public records and discover that he was convicted of murder while burglarizing a neighbor's house and was sentenced to prison. How would you feel about having *him* as a neighbor? I have often wondered how judges and parole-board members would act if they were to have the criminal they release live next door to them. I dare say they would probably be more careful who they parole.

What I have just said may give you some idea about how the angels of heaven must feel about having us live "next door" to them. They have witnessed our sinful acts. They have examined the heavenly records. They know all about our selfishness. They know about our sinful thoughts.

Part of the judgment of a human court should be to make those who will be living near a paroled criminal feel comfortable having him in the same community. Part of God's judgment is to make the angels of heaven feel comfortable having us living with them in heaven.

I would like to return to the illustration of the released convict.

How secure would we feel if all your ex-convict neighbor did was to show us a certificate from the parole board saying that he was reformed? We probably would not feel very confident. As a matter of fact, it would be surprising if a paroled criminal did not have such a certificate.

How secure would you feel if all your ex-convict neighbor did was to tell you that he had turned over a new leaf, that he was a changed man? If you reacted normally, his words of assurance would make little difference in your attitude toward him. In a similar way, mere words of assurance will mean little to the angels. They already went through one war in heaven and don't especially want to go through another one. A rather obvious way to avoid having such a problem again would be to exclude those who might start another war—namely us. Why take chances?

Let us return to the ex-convict neighbor illustration once again. What *would* make you feel secure having such a person as your neighbor? One thing that would help would be the assurances given by a friend of the ex-convict in whom we have confidence, someone who has witnessed the ex-convicts change for the better. But probably the only thing that would lay our fears completely to rest would be to be witnesses ourselves of the change the man experienced *before* he moved in next door.

Unfallen beings desire similar assurances. Before we are granted entrance into God's heavenly society, they will have, not only the testimony of a trusted friend, Jesus Christ, but they will have personally witnessed the change that has taken place in us.

Having been admitted to heaven, we will doubtless look around searching for loved ones. Some we will find there. Others will be missing. Now, as we have seen, one reason for the judgment is to satisfy the unfallen beings of the universe that we are safe for heaven. But another reason is to satisfy those who are saved that God was not arbitrary in refusing certain individuals admittance to heaven. God wants us to be satisfied that those who are lost were lost through their own choices. So, He opens the record books for us to examine. No wonder John the revelator saw the redeemed sitting on thrones of judgment during the thousand years they will spend in heaven. No wonder the apostle Paul says that we shall judge the world. See Revelation 20:4 and 1 Corinthians 6:2.

In Revelation 20 the second resurrection is described. This is 1000 years after the first resurrection. The city of God has descended to this earth. (Compare Revelation 20:9 and 21:2.) The rest of the dead are restored to life. To repent of their rebellion? No. To confess their sins in order to obtain forgiveness? No. To acknowledge the goodness of God? No. Do they show *any* signs of having learned the lesson that the history of sin and rebellion was meant to teach? No. We are told in Revelation 20:8, 9 that they are as susceptible to Satan's deceptions as they ever were. Pointing to their numbers, he urges them to surround the beloved city and the camp of the saints and capture it. It is at that point that the sin experiment runs its course. The lost are arrested in their mad act, and the last judgment takes place. As a panoramic scene the history of the great controversy is played out. Every being in the universe sees the part he has played in it—the decisions he has made that have either barred him from or qualified him for heaven. When it is over, even Satan acknowledges God's justice. So, the third reason for the judgment is to satisfy the lost that they are lost by their own choices. Then fire falls from heaven, and those who have been raised in the second resurrection are consumed.

In a sense God is on trial during this judgment. When sin originated, God's character was brought into question. At the end of the controversy every question has been answered. God's reason for this long, protracted process is to guarantee that sin will never arise a second time.

Some seem to think that there will be a "second chance" after death. They insist that a God as loving and merciful as our God is would never turn away a repentant sinner. And I agree. The only problem is, none of those raised at the second resurrection are repentant.

There is no mention of any of those raised at the second resurrection repenting of their sins and asking God's forgiveness. There is no mention of their recognizing the wisdom and love of God. They remain rebellious—despite a demonstration that should have satisfied any lingering doubts in any reasonable person.

This is the worst thing about sin. Not merely is it harmful in the

sense of an obvious harm; it is also harmful in that it alters a person for the worse. It destroys the taste for what is pure and good. Ultimately it destroys the ability to repent.

If we turn away from God, it is because we find Him distasteful to us. We do not enjoy being in His presence. We are uncomfortable in the presence of goodness.

During the day of salvation—this present lifetime—everyone is given an opportunity to be saved. But when the day of salvation is past, when every human being has made his decision, either to accept or reject salvation, probation closes. The demonstration is complete. The angels of heaven have long seen that Satan's accusations against God are lies. They now see something of the wisdom and the goodness of God that they could have learned in no other way. They see that God has given every opportunity for us to be saved, and they see that those who have taken advantage of the opportunity are safe to live with. Finally, they see that God could do nothing else than end the existence of those who would not be saved.

The Prosecution

In an earlier chapter I pointed out that a trial consists of a charge against the accused. While I referred to an accuser we did not explore the subject in depth. Obviously there must be an accuser. Let us now give this aspect of the subject some consideration.

Criminal proceedings do not begin unless someone brings charges. Cases are often dropped because the complaining witness refuses to prosecute. Often the complaining witness is a policeman or some other public official. But the complaining witness is not necessarily the same person as the one who files the charges. In fact he usually is not.

In the state where I practice, the charges are usually brought by an officer of the court called the district attorney. Only in rare instances is he the complaining witness. In any case the district attorney brings his charges before the court on the basis of information brought to him. Usually this is in the form of a police report.

A person who is the victim of a crime has every right to report the crime to the police. The accused, however, usually does not view things the same way. Some criminals have been known to intimidate their victims to prevent them from reporting the crime. Such efforts by criminals do not alter the fact that a crime victim has the obligation to report a crime. As a matter of fact, it is a crime to conceal a crime.

Like all fitting and proper things the reporting of a crime can be perverted. Obviously there is nothing fitting and proper about

falsely reporting a crime. But even when the complaining witness is telling the truth the best he can, he can do it for the wrong reasons. His motive may be revenge. This is one of Satan's motives. He wants to hurt us. Human courts do not attempt to determine the motives of the complaining witness. So long as the witness is telling the truth the best he can, this is all the court requires. We know, however, that a person who is prejudiced against the accused is rarely inclined to give the criminal the benefit of any doubt. The same is true of Satan. He is prejudiced against us and does not want to see us acquitted in the judgment.

Christ Our Advocate

In earthly courts we see attorneys arguing the cases for their respective clients. Do we see something comparable in the heavenly court? We do.

In 1 John 2:1 we read, “My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but *if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*” Emphasis supplied.

So, Jesus Christ is our advocate. Of what does His advocacy consist?

Advocacy in a criminal case, as we have seen, does not stop with a finding of guilt. As an attorney I know there is much more that has to be done, and this much more has to do with the sentence my client might receive on conviction. If you read the verse in 1 John I have just quoted you will see that this is where Christ’s advocacy begins. His advocacy is for the *guilty*, not for the innocent. It assumes that His client is guilty. His advocacy deals with that guilt.

Having dealt with many cases as an advocate, I can say that being accused of a crime is usually a lonely experience. Everywhere the accused looks among the court officials, he sees unfriendly faces. Only when his advocate appears does he see someone on his side. As a result, a defendant being tried is usually willing to listen to what his advocate has to say. In my practice I try to suggest to my client things that will lead him to a happy, productive life.

The reason for an advocate is to help a client in ways that he

cannot help himself. The advocate's training and experience mean that he can understand the client's problems in relation to the law better than the client can. The advocate's detachment from the problem means that he can see the situation more objectively. But this very objectivity sometimes leads to friction with the client, because the client wants his advocate to be as upset about his problem as he is!

Actually this isn't so strange. It is natural for people to want to justify themselves. They want to see themselves as being right. Nowhere is this trait more apparent than in a criminal proceeding. Curiously this trait is more obvious with the occasional criminal than with a repeat offender.

I remember a case in which a woman client was arrested for shoplifting. Although she admitted being guilty, she felt that she was being treated unfairly. Her attitude placed me in a quandary. The woman could not seem to bear the thought of going through a trial. That was bad enough. But in addition she could not stand the thought of spending a day in jail. The law was clear on this point, and there was nothing I could do about it.

The district attorney had set a policy that all people guilty of shoplifting had to spend a day in jail as part of any plea bargain. After my client vacillated back and forth, trying to weasel out of her predicament, I finally led her to see that she must face the situation. Reluctantly she accepted my suggestion that she get it over with by entering an immediate plea of guilty. I pointed out that if she pleaded guilty just then (it was about 10:30 in the morning), she would be released at 8:00 the next morning. By so doing she would spend less than twenty-four hours in jail. Apparently this consideration impressed her, and she reluctantly accepted my suggestion.

On another occasion I defended a young man who was charged with burglary. When I interviewed him in jail he was most insistent that he shouldn't be there. He strongly protested his innocence. When I asked him what had happened, he explained that late one Saturday night some friends brought over some goods—a portable television set, a radio, lamps, etc. They asked him to hide them. Later these "friends" were arrested for burglary and put the finger on him as an accomplice. The police searched his home

and discovered the stolen goods. He too was arrested for burglary.

I asked him whether he had any idea that the goods were stolen. He admitted that he figured they probably were. I let him finish his story and then pointed out that, while he may not have been guilty of actual burglary, there was a crime called receiving stolen property. He saw my point. His indignation collapsed, and he began to cooperate with me. Then I was able to work out a probation program with the district attorney.

My services in these and other cases have basically been to get my clients to face the facts. This is an important part of Christ's advocacy. He too must get us to face the fact that we are guilty sinners and that a change must take place in us so great that it is called a new birth.

There is one point our English Bibles don't bring out. The Greek word translated "advocate" in 1 John 2:1 is *paraklētos*. It means, literally, "one called alongside." In court an advocate is "one called alongside" the client. The same Greek word also appears in John 14:26, 15:26, and 16:7 referring to the Holy Spirit. In the King James Version the word is translated as "comforter," a word that has changed in meaning since KJV was first published in 1611. I have heard sermons preached on what a comfort, in the modern sense, the Holy Spirit is. But our English word *comfort*, which is derived from the Latin *com*, "with," and *fortis*, "strong," in 1611 meant "to strengthen" not to "cheer" or "console" as it means today.

The Revised Standard Version uses the word *counselor*, which comes closer to the original meaning. A few translations render it "helper."

The translation "advocate" in the sense of "one called to the side of a defendant involved in a court case" brings out the legal aspect of the word *paraklētos*. Now 1 John 2:1 says that Christ is our advocate *with* the Father. This is an unusual use of the term. When I represent a client in a case, I am not an advocate *with* a court. I may advocate someone's cause *before* a court, but I do not advocate his cause *with* a court or, for that matter, *against* a court. If I do any advocating *with* someone it is with another advocate who is on the same side.

This fact brings out a point that most people miss. Many people

somehow have the idea that Christ paid the penalty of our transgressions to the Father. But the truth of the matter is that He paid the penalty of our sins to the *just demands* of God's law. Those who conceive of Christ's ministry on behalf of sinners as appeasing the Father have an erroneous concept of God. The Father is not a stern, unsympathetic judge who has to be appeased. The truth is the very opposite of this. The Bible presents the Father as being another advocate on the same side as Jesus Christ. The two of Them are working together for the salvation of Their clients. The Father does not need to be appeased or persuaded to be merciful. He already is willing. This fact is brought out in John 16:27—"The Father himself loves you."

Just as I need to get across to my client what sort of trouble he is in, in order to get him to cooperate fully in his own defense and in a plan of subsequent reformation, so the Father and the Son need to get across to us what our real condition is so that we will cooperate in our defense and in our reformation. If I am convinced that my client will cooperate, I, as his advocate, can assure the court of that fact and ask for leniency. So if our heavenly Advocates can be assured of our cooperation, They can present us to the unfallen universe as worthy subjects of mercy.

In actual fact there isn't much that we can do to help our case. But the little part that we do play is of crucial importance. All we can do is choose. But our choice determines what follows. If we make the right choice, if we choose to cooperate with our heavenly Advocates, a reformation is wrought by them within us. A change takes place so complete that we no longer put ourselves first; our own personal preferences are no longer the most important things in life. This is one of the most important aspects of Christ's and the Father's advocacy on our behalf.

The Great Trial

The Bible does not use the word *trial* in the sense of a trial in a court of law. It uses the word *judgment*, and it uses this word in a wider sense than we ordinarily use it in English. It includes not only what we ordinarily include in the term, “the decision of a court,” but also the trial itself. The *trial*, as opposed to the judgment, is the presentation of evidence to the court. In Daniel 7:10 we read that “the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.” This is not a scene in which the accused people are called before the court to hear its decision. It is a *trial* as well as a decision.

As an attorney I have taken part in a number of trials, both civil and criminal. I have prosecuted some people and defended others. I know what it means to interview witnesses before the trial. It is at this point that I learn what proof is available. I know what it is to have witnesses suffer lapses of memory during their testimonies. I have examined and cross-examined witnesses, so I know what is involved.

A trial is a good deal different from an investigation. It is much more structured. An investigation simply gathers information. This information is usually gathered for some specific purpose. The investigation can be completely unofficial. But even when it is official, as by the police or even a congressional committee, it falls far short of the formality of a trial.

A trial takes place only after someone has filed charges against a person who is accused of violating a law. In a country that has a good legal system these charges are more than just a statement

that the accused spoke against the rulers of the country, for example. Rather the accuser must point out that the accused has violated some recognized law.

A person is not brought before a court merely on a charge of breaking the rules of etiquette. This, of course, in no way minimizes the rules of etiquette. Rules of etiquette are important in their sphere, but they involve no breach of a legal code. For there to be a legal trial there must be a violation of a duly constituted law. This means that there must be an authority backing up these rules. Otherwise these rules are less than useless. They must be more than just my ideas of what is right or your ideas of what is right.

Some seem to think that this authority is found in society's agreement to abide by the will of the majority. This may work for most matters. But the will of the majority is no more righteous than the righteous character of those who compose it. Righteousness is something that is determined by God's law, not human standards.

When a Christian refuses to abide by the will of the majority of the society of which he forms a part, he does so because there is something that has vastly greater authority to him than the will of the majority. In the beginning, when God created human beings, He established an order that human beings could understand and that appealed to reason.

A trial has to do with whether or not the accused has, in fact, violated a law. In ordinary legal proceedings guilt is established either by the testimony of witnesses who saw what went on or by a plea of guilty. A Christian pleads guilty and throws himself on the mercy of the court and does everything within his power to make amends. When he does this, not only is he acquitted, but he is given power to live in harmony with the law. Others, however, insist that they are not guilty. Such individuals have to undergo the process of a trial. The ordinary trial begins with a hearing. In a similar way there is a hearing in the heavenly court.

My own church uses the term "investigative judgment" to describe this process. The purpose of this hearing is not to inform God who are fit for heaven and who are not. This He already knows because He is omniscient. The purpose of this hearing is to

convince the angels and unfallen beings on other worlds that repentant sinners will never reintroduce sin into heaven. These beings have been witnesses to our manner of living, and, in addition, they have at their disposal the record of our lives. It is on the basis of these two things that they conclude that some are worthy candidates for heaven and others are not.

Rewards and Punishment

Up to this point we have dealt mainly with the trial process of God's judgment. We shall now examine some aspects of what happens *after* the judgment.

A human court's judgment makes a difference to the person judged. A person that is acquitted is not treated the same as a person that is adjudged guilty. In a similar way a person that is acquitted in the divine tribunal is not treated the same as the person that is found guilty. Those who are acquitted go to heaven, and those who are found guilty are ultimately cast into the lake of fire.

What does the Bible say about these fates? The fact of the matter is that the Bible says little about heaven. And yet it does give us some important information. Some of this information is positive, and some of it is negative. By "negative" I mean that the Bible speaks of certain things that *won't* happen in heaven. For example, there shall be *no* more death, *no* more crying, *no* more pain. And the reason for this is that "the former things are passed away." Revelation 21:4, KJV.

Curiously, the Bible is much more specific in regard to the negative aspects of heaven than it is with respect to the positive. If we look for some detailed explanation of what we will be doing or what heaven will be like, well, there simply isn't very much information. Now I would suggest that this lack of positive information is intentional on God's part. In 1 Corinthians 2:9 we read, "No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him."

It is my conviction that the reason God has given us some spe-

cific *negative* information but little specific *positive* information is that, in our present fallen state, we would not appreciate what He has prepared for us. Let me explain.

Anyone can appreciate the fact that in heaven there will be neither death, nor sorrow, nor pain, nor any reason for tears. But the positive side of heaven is something else. I believe that if, in our fallen state, we knew exactly what heaven will be like, our fallen natures would not be attracted to it.

Let me illustrate. When I was a boy I read Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Huck, you may remember, had been reared by a drunken father in the lowest imaginable conditions. Among other things he did not bathe or go to school. Then he was adopted by the Widow Douglas. At her home he was given regular meals, good clothes, and a warm bed. What more could one ask? And yet Huck was miserable. His "nature" was such that he couldn't enjoy what "civilized" people enjoy. In a similar way, we cannot, in our fallen, mortal state, possibly appreciate the bliss of heaven in its fullness. And we will not be able to appreciate it until "this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality." 1 Corinthians 15:54, KJV.

Since God has not seen fit to reveal to us very much about what heaven will be like, I think it behooves us to be careful about making heaven too much like the things of this earth in their present state, even though there will doubtless be similarities. After all, heaven will be Eden restored. If the pair that was expelled from Eden were still the pair that lived in Eden before the fall, there must be links between the two. At the same time there are bound to be dissimilarities. So only when our fallen natures are changed will we be able fully to appreciate those things that God has prepared for those who love Him. See 1 Corinthians 2:9.

But what happens to those who neglect or reject the salvation that God offers to sinners? The majority of Christians believe that God consigns them to the torments of hell for eternity. Others believe that ultimately God saves everyone. Still others believe that sinners will be punished according to their works, after which they cease to exist.

Does the Bible teach eternal torment? There certainly are texts

that sound as if it does. How can one get around such texts as Matthew 25:46, "They [the lost] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life," or Revelation 14:11, "The smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever"?

The answer to these and other similar passages of Scripture is that they use either the Hebrew word *'olam* or the Greek words *aiōn* or *aiōnios*. The basic meaning of these words is "indefinite duration." When these words are applied to God, they mean unending duration in the absolute sense. But when they refer to created things whose existence depends on God, they mean duration for a undefined period, usually characterized by some kind of activity, hence an age. Thus, for example, Galatians 1:4 speaks of "the present evil age." Romans 16:25 speaks of "the mystery [of salvation] which was kept secret for long ages." Ephesians 2:7 speaks of "the coming ages."

The expression in Revelation 14:11 and 20:10 is *eis tous aiōnas tōn aiōnōv*, often translated "for ever and ever." However the preposition *eis* may be translated "until," as in Ephesians 1:14. In other words, the lost will be punished "until the ages of the ages." Understood in the latter sense, it simply means that the lost will be punished until the ages of the ages begin, but not beyond. When their punishment is over, they cease to exist.

Salvation irrespective of character is neither just nor merciful. What is just or merciful about saving someone who doesn't want to be saved? Unable to live a dissolute life in heaven, a profligate would be miserable. What would be just about forcing such a person to go to heaven? To ask the question is to answer it.

When God created free moral beings, He said in effect: I have given you existence, but it is on condition. As your Creator this is My right, for without Me you would not exist. The rules I have laid down for your existence are just and are designed to promote your well-being. I appeal to you to obey them and live forever. But as a free moral agent you can choose to disobey them. If you choose to disobey them, you will be punished according to your works and in the process return to the nonexistence from which you came.

This is both just and merciful. And this is how God will dispose of sin.

When Is the Judgment?

I have participated in a number of trials during my professional life, and I have to admit that I have rather enjoyed them. There is a certain exhilaration connected with a trial.

There is one thing about trying cases that those not used to trial work never think of, and that is the problem of getting a case to trial. You have to get your case on the court's docket at a time when a judge is free to try your case.

When does the trial before the heavenly court take place? When is the evidence presented? When is the case decided? When is the judgment announced?

I suggest that in God's judgment these events do not all take place successively. In our earthly legal systems they usually follow rather closely one after another. The evidence is presented to the court, and the jury retires to consider the matter. After it has reached a decision, it comes in and announces the verdict. Then, some weeks later, the judgment is entered. But this assumes a verdict of "guilty." If the verdict is "not guilty," the judgment is entered at once.

Most of this is affected by the convenience of the judge and jury. It makes sense that as much as possible should be done while the jury is together. This is not so much of a problem with the heavenly court.

Since the purpose of the heavenly trial is not so much to prove the guilt of the accused as to satisfy the onlooking universe of the justice of the decision rendered, the order of events does not necessarily follow in the order of an earthly court. In our system of

jurisprudence the verdict follows the presentation of evidence. The jury does not decide the case until it has heard the evidence.

It is an interesting observation that when juries first came into use in England, they were selected from those who knew the facts in a given case. This was just the opposite of our present practice. The ancient jurors were gathered from among knowledgeable people and were asked about the facts. They gave a verdict, literally a "true saying," from the Latin *vere dictum*. To the extent that there was a presentation of evidence, this presentation was the actual occurrence of the events. Later, when the authorities realized that they could not always find jurors who knew *all* of the facts, they began to call witnesses. By now our system of law has evolved to the point that we *exclude* from our juries those who know anything of the facts.

The heavenly hearing is more like the original jury procedure. God in His omniscience personally observes all the facts in all cases. He doesn't need information. It is not necessary for Him to have witnesses. He could announce His decision accordingly, and it would be just. But the decision could leave His justice in doubt in the minds of His rational creatures.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 we read that when Christ comes the second time, those who are His will be caught up to meet Him. This indicates that they have been judged worthy of heaven. This act demonstrates that a decision has been made with respect to the saved, who go to heaven with the Lord, and to the lost, who are left behind.

All of this suggests that the examination of the heavenly records takes place just before Christ's second coming. I don't mean that it must take place *immediately* before His coming; I mean that in the thousands of years of human history this examination takes place at the end. There can be a period between the end of the examination and the coming. What I am saying is that it is a comparatively short period, perhaps comparable to the time it takes a jury to notify the bailiff that it has reached a verdict. He tells the judge and notifies the parties. They gather in the courtroom, and then the jury comes in. This takes a little while. But it isn't long. Similarly the time from the final review of the records until the coming of Christ is not long.

This review of the records satisfies the unfallen angels. But what of those who are taken up to heaven? They have not seen what the angels have witnessed.

At first they will be so delighted at being in heaven that they think of nothing else. But, as time goes on, they begin to notice things. A loved one, someone they thought would surely be there, is missing. They will undoubtedly want to know why.

There is need for a second examination of the records. We read of this in Revelation 20:4 and 1 Corinthians 6:2 that the redeemed have a part in the judgment. Not only does God want unfallen beings to be satisfied, He wants the redeemed to be satisfied with His decision. So He opens the records of heaven to them, He calls in the recording angels who witnessed everything, and He satisfies the redeemed with the justice of His decision.

At the end of the millennium those that are lost are resurrected, and the third phase of God's judgment takes place. As the history of the great controversy is played out in panoramic detail, each individual sees how his life fits into the picture. The lost see the decisions they made of their own free choice which have placed them outside the New Jerusalem. They see that they have no one to blame but themselves for being lost. The evidence is clear and incontrovertible. Little wonder that all the wicked, including Satan himself, bow down and acknowledge God's justice and the justice of His sentence. See Isa. 45:23, 24.

It is only *after* this that the sentence against the lost is executed. Every individual is punished, not forever and ever, but according as their works have been. He that did things worthy of much punishment will receive "many stripes," and he that did things worthy of little punishment will receive "few stripes." See Luke 12:47, 48, KJV. This is just, but it is also merciful. Little wonder that after the judgment is over sin will never arise the second time.

Bringing It All Together

Any book on religion should promote the personal salvation of those who read it. This book is no exception. You may well be wondering what this book has to do with your personal salvation. After all, I have scarcely touched on the subject.

Our salvation is, basically, becoming fit for heaven. And our confidence in God has much to do with our becoming fit for heaven. The technical word we use for that confidence is *faith*.

I prefer not to use the word *faith*. It has too much technical theological baggage that obscures a clear message. I prefer to use the expression “confidence in God.” If we have this confidence in God we will submit to the treatment that will fit us for heaven. If we do not have this confidence, we will rebel at that treatment and will end up as unfit as we started out.

Nor is this all. If we *understand* the treatment, we will submit to it that much more willingly. One of the purposes of this book is to make clear the reason for much of what God does. Almost everyone will agree that if a person understands why a physician is giving him some foul-tasting medicine, he will be more likely to take it than if he is simply told that the doctor knows what he is doing and to start swallowing.

What is this confidence in God and how do we get it? Surely this confidence in God is a firm confidence in His wisdom, His power, and His willingness to do what needs to be done to fit us for heaven. This confidence will be greater and firmer if we can participate in what He is trying to get us to understand.

But how do we get this confidence? Surely one way is to see

Him in action. We develop confidence in our lawyer and our physician by seeing them in action, by seeing how well they perform their work. Much the same can be said of our relationship with God.

When we study God's judgment we are, so to speak, seeing Him in action. As a result we can better appreciate His great wisdom. When we study God's judgment we see that it is His way of dealing with the rebellion that took place in heaven and is taking place on earth. We see the nature and purpose of God's law. We see something of the problem our fallen nature makes for God. We learn something of the power of choice. We learn that God wants *willing* obedience, not just obedience. In comparing God's judgment with earthly judgments we learn something that shows us His wisdom and patience. We learn that it is not enough that God *be just*; it is also important that His judgment *seem* to be just.

In our study we have learned something about the evil of sin. It is more than simply the "transgression of the law." It also involves a rejection of God's plan for our rebirth to a new life.

We learned that God has a problem in extending mercy to sinners and how He deals with that problem. We learned how the unfallen beings of other worlds are assured beforehand that you and I are safe to be saved, safe to live with them throughout eternity. We also learned how God in the final judgment answers every question concerning the great controversy and satisfies every free moral agent in the universe, both fallen and unfallen, both saved and unsaved, and shows that He is a God of love, that He is both just and merciful.

We learned something of Christ our Advocate. We learned something of the "unjust judge" that shows us why God can delay His judgment so long and still be just.

As a result of this knowledge we can trust God with greater confidence. We can allow Him to do what needs to be done to make us fit for eternity.

We are told that in order to be saved we must accept Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour. But there is something we often overlook in this regard. Accepting Him and committing ourselves to Him totally is *not* a one-time proposition. Our lives must be lives of ever deepening commitment as the Holy Spirit brings to

our consciousness things in our lives that need to be overcome by divine grace. No, once saved is not enough. Our decision to accept salvation must continually be reaffirmed. We need to accept Christ every day, every hour.

As we understand God, His goodness, His wisdom, His power, His faithfulness, we rise above our changeable feelings. We base our confidence on these solid facts.

God's judgment helps demonstrate His justice, His mercy, His goodness, His wisdom, His power, and His faithfulness. If this book makes you more aware of all these traits of the divine character, it has accomplished its purpose.